



LINEAGE AND HONORS OF THE 509TH AIRBORNE INFANTRY

WITH THE ADVENT OF WORLD WAR TWO, THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES FORESAW A NEED FOR HIGHLY MOBILE UNITS THAT THE ALLIES COULD QUICKLY INSERT INTO THE THEATER OF BATTLE. AN EXPERIMENT BEGAN AT FORT BENNING, GEORGIA WHERE A GROUP OF VOLUNTEERS BEGAN JUMPING OUT OF PERFECTLY GOOD AIRCRAFT WHILE IN FLIGHT. THUS WAS BORN THE AMERICAN PARATROOPERS. FOLLOWING GREAT DEBATE AND AN ARDUOUS COMMAND DECISION, THE UNITED STATES ARMY BEGAN FORMING AIRBORNE UNITS FOR COMBAT. ON 14 MARCH 1941, COMPANY A, 504TH PARACHUTE BATTALION WAS CONSTITUTED AND THEN ACTIVATED ON 5 OCTOBER 1941 AT FORT BENNING, GEORGIA.

THE 504TH MOVED TO FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA FOR TRAINING IN FEBRUARY 1942, AND BECAME PART OF ONE OF THE ARMY'S FIRST PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENTS. THE 503RD AND 504TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY BATTALIONS WERE JOINED TOGETHER TO FORM THE 503RD PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT, WITH THE 504TH BEING RENAMED COMPANY D, 503RD PARACHUTE INFANTRY ON 24 FEBRUARY 1942.

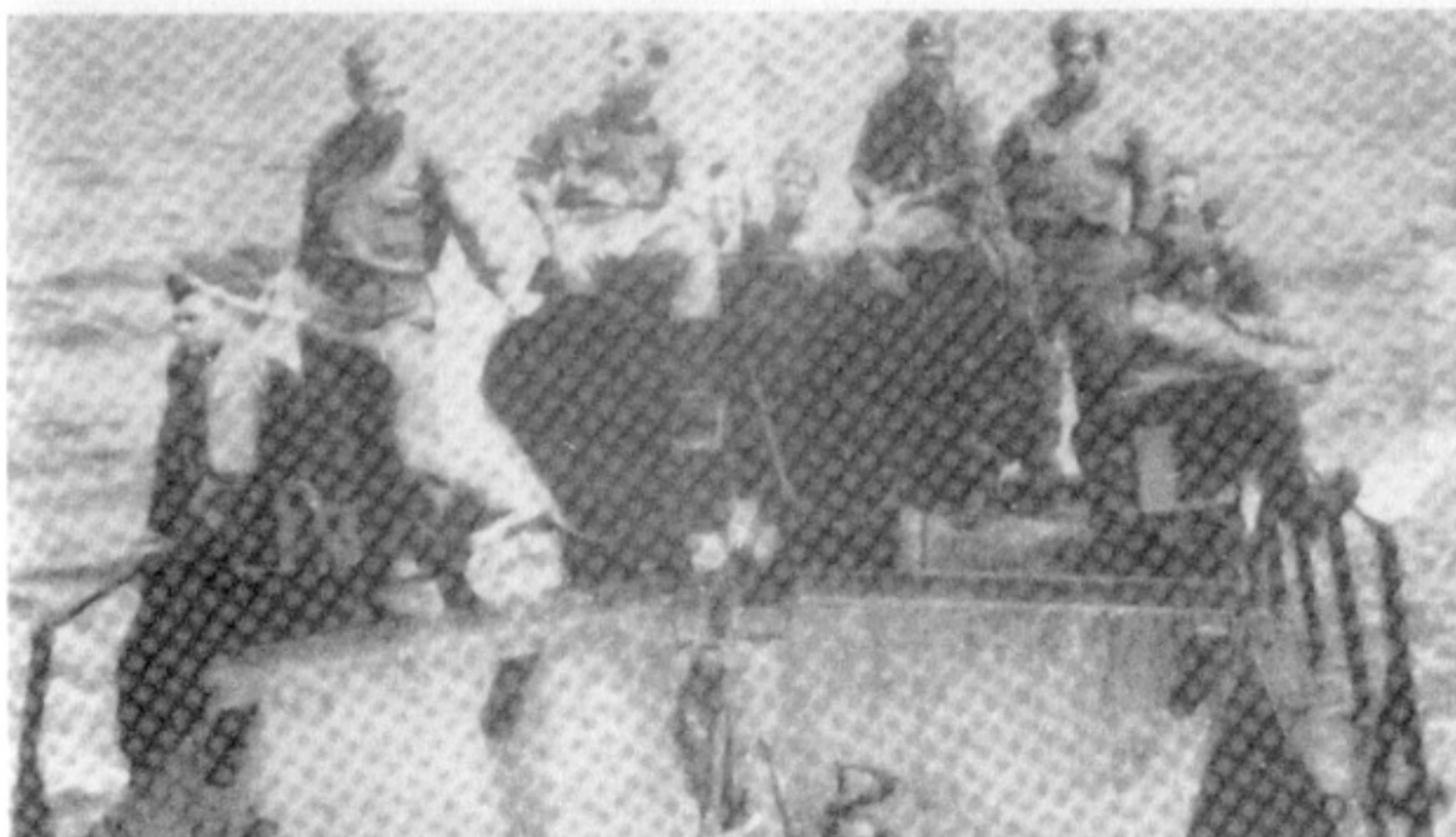
AS AN INDEPENDENT BATTALION, THE 503RD SAILED TO SCOTLAND IN JUNE 1942, BECOMING THE FIRST AMERICAN PARACHUTE UNIT TO GO OVERSEAS IN WORLD WAR TWO. IT WAS ATTACHED TO THE BRITISH 1ST AIRBORNE DIVISION FOR TRAINING. THE TRAINING INCLUDED MASS TACTICAL JUMPS FROM C-47 AIRCRAFT AT 350 FEET, EXTENSIVE NIGHT TRAINING, AND SPEED MARCHING FOR 10 MILES TO AND FROM THE TRAINING AREA DAILY; AND ON ONE OCCASION, 32 MILES IN 11 HOURS. ON 2 NOVEMBER, AS THE 503RD WAS STAGING FOR OPERATION TORCH, THE INVASION OF NORTH AFRICA, IT WAS REORGANIZED AND REDESIGNATED AS COMPANY D, 509TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY. ON THIS MOMENTOUS DAY, AS C-47'S FLEW OVER THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE, THE 509TH PARATROOPER WAS BORN.



THE TRAINING PAID OFF WHEN THE 509TH SPEARHEADED THE ALLIED INVASION OF NORTH AFRICA. THE LONGEST AIRBORNE OPERATION OCCURRED 8 NOVEMBER 1942. AFTER A C-47 FLIGHT OF OVER 1600 MILES FROM ENGLAND, THE BATTALION SEIZED TAFARQUAY AIRPORT IN ORAN, ALGERIA BY PARACHUTE ASSAULT. ONE WEEK LATER, AFTER REPACKING THEIR OWN CHUTES (EVERY MAN WAS HIS OWN RIGGER IN THOSE DAYS), THE BATTALION CONDUCTED THEIR SECOND COMBAT JUMP ON 15 NOVEMBER 1942 TO SECURE THE AIRFIELD AT YOUK-LES-BAINS NEAR THE TUNISIAN BORDER. FROM THIS BASE THE BATTALION CONDUCTED COMBINED OPERATIONS WITH VARIOUS FRENCH FORCES AGAINST THE GERMAN AFRIKA KORPS IN TUNISIA. ONE UNIT, THE 3RD REGIMENT OF ZOUAVES (FRENCH ALGERIAN INFANTRY), AWARDED THEIR OWN REGIMENTAL CREST AS A GESTURE OF RESPECT TO THE AMERICAN PARATROOPERS. THIS BADGE WAS AWARDED TO THE BATTALION COMMANDER ON 15 NOVEMBER 1942 BY THE 3RD ZOUAVES' REGIMENTAL COMMANDER, AND IS WORN TODAY BY ALL MEMBERS OF THE 509TH INFANTRY.

FROM DECEMBER 1942 TO JUNE 1943, THE 509TH TRAINED IN ALGERIA, TUNISIA AND MOROCCO IN PREPARATION FOR THE ALLIED INVASION OF SICILY IN JULY 1943. DURING THE INVASION OF SICILY, THE 509TH WAS ATTACHED TO THE 82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION, BUT WAS HELD IN DIVISION RESERVE AND SAW NO ACTION IN THAT CAMPAIGN.

THE INVASION OF ITALY BEGAN IN SEPTEMBER 1943 WITH THE AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT AT SALERNO. THE 509TH WAS INITIALLY IN RESERVE WITH THE 82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION IN SICILY UNTIL THE BEACHHEAD WAS IN DANGER. ON 14 SEPTEMBER, WHILE THE 82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION DROPPED INSIDE AMERICAN LINES TO REINFORCE THE BEACHHEAD, THE 509TH WAS ASSIGNED THE MISSION OF CUTTING ENEMY SUPPLY LINES BEHIND THE GERMAN DEFENSIVE POSITIONS. THE 509TH LAUNCHED ITS THIRD PARACHUTE ASSAULT AT AVELLINO, ITALY, ONLY TO FIND THAT THE VALLEY DZ WAS OCCUPIED THE NIGHT BEFORE BY THE 6TH GERMAN ARMORED PANZER DIVISION. THE 509TH OPERATED INDEPENDENTLY FOR SOME TWO WEEKS BEHIND GERMAN LINES IN COMPANY AND PLATOON SIZE ELEMENTS DISRUPTING THE GERMAN REAR AREA. SEPARATE UNITS SCROUNGED FOR FOOD AND WATER AMONG THE ITALIAN CIVILIANS UNTIL THE UNIT FINALLY REASSEMBLED IN SALERNO ON 28 SEPTEMBER 1943. TOTAL CASUALTIES WERE 123 KILLED OR CAPTURED INCLUDING THE 509TH COMMANDER AND HIS ENTIRE STAFF.



ON 10 DECEMBER 1943 THE BATTALION WAS REORGANIZED AND REDESIGNATED ONE MORE TIME TO COMPANY A, 509TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY BATTALION, AND RECOGNIZED AS AN INDEPENDENT UNIT. DURING THIS PERIOD, OCTOBER THROUGH DECEMBER 1943, THE BATTALION OPERATED WITH DARBY'S RANGERS, AND FOUGHT AS MOUNTAIN INFANTRY IN THE HIGH GROUND ABOVE VENAFCO, ITALY.

THE 509TH'S NEXT OPERATION WAS AN AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT (REPRESENTED BY THE FIFTH ARROWHEAD ON OUR UNIT CREST) AT ANZIO, ITALY, ON 21 JANUARY 1944. STILL OPERATING WITH DARBY'S RANGERS, THE 509TH WAS IN THE FIRST ASSAULT WAVE OF THE INVASION FORCE. THE RANGERS SENT TWO BATTALIONS AGAINST AN ELITE GERMAN ARMORED DIVISION ON THE BEACHHEAD, WHILE THE 509TH WAS ASSIGNED A CRITICAL DEFENSIVE POSITION WHICH THEY HELD DESPITE HEAVY LOSSES. FOR ITS HEROIC ACTIONS IN STOPPING THE DESPERATE GERMAN COUNTERATTACK AT CARANO, ITALY, THE 509TH WAS AWARDED THE PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION, THE FIRST PARACHUTE UNIT SO HONORED. IN ADDITION TO THE BATTALION AWARD OF 29 FEBRUARY, CHARLIE COMPANY WON A SECOND PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION FOR A NIGHT ATTACK ON 14 MARCH, AND CORPORAL, NOW SERGEANT MAJOR (RETIRED) PAUL B. HUFF BECAME THE FIRST PARATROOPER TO WIN THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR.

AFTER ANZIO, THE 509TH CONDUCTED ITS FOURTH PARACHUTE ASSAULT AND FIFTH COMBAT ASSAULT SPEARHEADING THE ATTACK BY THE FIRST AIRBORNE TASK FORCE AT LE MUY, IN SOUTHERN FRANCE, ON 14 AUGUST 1944. DECEMBER 1944 SAW THE 509TH ATTACHED TO THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION IN TIME FOR THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE. IN ANOTHER DEFENSIVE MISSION, AGAINST INCREDIBLE ODDS, THE 509TH HELD OUT FROM 22 TO 30 DECEMBER AT SADZOT, BELGIUM, AGAINST TWO PANZER GRENADIER BATTALIONS, BOTH ELITE GERMAN MECHANIZED INFANTRY UNITS, AND EARNED THE BATTALION ITS SECOND PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION. IN JANUARY, TASKED WITH AN OFFENSIVE MISSION, THE 509TH ADVANCED IN THE HILLS OF ST. VITH, BELGIUM, CAPTURING AND HOLDING CRITICAL HIGH GROUND FOR THE PASSAGE OF THE 7TH ARMORED DIVISION. AFTER THE ACTION, WHICH LEFT ONLY SEVEN OFFICERS AND FORTY-EIGHT ENLISTED MEN IN THE ENTIRE BATTALION, THE 509TH FELL VICTIM TO REORGANIZATION ONE LAST TIME.



TOWARD THE END OF WORLD WAR TWO, SEPARATE PARACHUTE INFANTRY BATTALIONS WERE NO LONGER CONSIDERED NECESSARY, AND THE 509TH WAS DISBANDED ON 1 MARCH 1945, WITH THE SURVIVORS AND RETURNING WOUNDED BEING SENT TO THE 82ND OR 13TH AIRBORNE DIVISIONS AS REPLACEMENTS. THE 509TH WAS LATER RECONSTITUTED ON 12 MAY 1947 IN THE REGULAR ARMY AS COMPANY A, 509TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY BATTALION, AND REDESIGNATED ON 27 MARCH 1963 AS HEADQUARTERS AND HEADQUARTERS COMPANY, 1ST BATTALION, 509TH INFANTRY, WITH SUBSEQUENT ASSIGNMENT TO THE 8TH INFANTRY DIVISION.

THE 509TH WAS REACTIVATED IN MAINZ, GERMANY, AS TWO BATTALIONS, THEN LATER REDUCED TO ONE BATTALION DURING THE SUMMER OF 1973.

ON 1 SEPTEMBER 1973, THE 509TH WAS RELIEVED FROM ASSIGNMENT TO THE 8TH ARMY AND SUBSEQUENTLY MOVED TO VICENZA, ITALY. IN 1975, ONE COMPANY OF THE 509TH MOVED TO THE CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES TO FILL THE REQUIREMENT FOR A COMPANY SIZED AIRBORNE/ PATHFINDER UNIT TO SUPPORT THE UNITED STATES ARMY AVIATION CENTER AT FORT RUCKER, ALABAMA. THE REDESIGNATION OF THE 509TH AIRBORNE BATTALION COMBAT TEAM IN ITALY AS THE 4TH BATTALION, 325TH INFANTRY IN JULY 1983 LEFT C COMPANY, 509TH INFANTRY (AIRBORNE/PATHFINDER) AS THE ONLY REMAINING UNIT OF THE REGIMENT.

ON 18 DECEMBER 1987 THE HEADQUARTERS FOR THE 509TH WAS TRANSFERRED TO THE UNITED STATES ARMY TRAINING AND DOCTRINE COMMAND AND ORGANIZED AT LITTLE ROCK AIR FORCE BASE, ARKANSAS.

A COMPANY, B COMPANY, AND D TROOP WERE FORMED AND INITIALLY SERVED AT FORT CHAFFEE, ARKANSAS AS THE OPPOSING FORCES FOR THE ARMY'S JOINT READINESS TRAINING CENTER. IN 1993 THE 509TH WAS TRANSFERRED TO THE U.S. ARMY FORCES COMMAND AND SUBSEQUENTLY MOVED TO FORT POLK, LOUISIANA, WHERE IT SERVES TODAY AS THE WORLD'S PREMIER OPPOSING FORCE FOR LIGHT INFANTRY AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES



CAMPAIGNS

**CAMPAIGN PARTICIPATION CREDITS OF THE 1ST BATTALION (ABN), 509TH INFANTRY
INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING CAMPAIGNS OF WORLD WAR II (*DESIGNATES CAMPAIGN
ARROWHEADS FOR SPEARHEADING ACTION):**

ALGERIA-FRENCH MOROCCO*

TUNISIA*

NAPLES-FOGGIA*

ANZIO*

ROME-ARNO

SOUTHERN FRANCE*

RHINELAND

ARDENNES-ALSACE

AWARDS PRESENTED TO 1ST BATTALION (ABN), 509TH INFANTRY:

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION (ARMY), STREAMER EMBROIDERED LIEGE, BELGIUM

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION (ARMY), STREAMER EMBROIDERED CARANO, ITALY

**FRENCH CROIX DE GUERRE WITH SILVER STAR, STREAMER EMBROIDERED MUY
EN PROVENCE**

CITATION IN THE ORDER OF THE DAY OF THE BELGIAN ARMY FOR ACTION IN ARDENNES

CITATION IN THE ORDER OF THE DAY OF THE BELGIAN ARMY FOR ACTION IN ST. VITH

INSIGNIA OF THE FRENCH 3D ZOUAVES REGIMENT



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 1ST-509TH

FIRST U. S. AIRBORNE UNIT TO DEPLOY OVERSEAS ARRIVING IN LAND'S END, ENGLAND ON 10 JUNE 1942.

EXECUTED THE LOWEST ALTITUDE MASS PARACHUTE JUMP IN HISTORY EXITING THE AIRCRAFT A 143 FEET IN ENGLAND DURING JUNE 1942 REHEARSALS.

INITIALLY AWARDED THE "RIGHT" TO WEAR RED BERETS BY MAJOR GENERAL SIR FREDERICK A.M. BROWNING, COMMANDER, 1ST BRITISH AIRBORNE, WHO MADE THE 509TH HONORARY "RED DEVILS."

PERFORMED AMERICA'S FIRST COMBAT PARACHUTE INSERTION ON 8 NOVEMBER 1942 FOLLOWING THE LONGEST COMBAT INVASION IN HISTORY OF 1600 MILES FROM ENGLAND TO NORTH AFRICA.

CONDUCTED FIVE COMBAT JUMPS DURING WORLD WAR II: THREE INTO NORTH AFRICA, ONE INTO ITALY AND ONE INTO SOUTHERN FRANCE.

LED AMPHIBIOUS INVASION WITH DARBY'S RANGERS AT ANZIO, ITALY ON 22 JANUARY 1944, AND SUBSEQUENTLY PARTICIPATED IN A SUCCESSFUL ALLIED CAMPAIGN THAT LASTED 70 DAYS.

FIRST AIRBORNE UNIT AWARDED THE PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION, 29 FEBRUARY 1942. ALSO AWARDED ANOTHER PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION IN 1945.

PAUL B. HUFF, A MEMBER OF THE 509TH, WAS THE FIRST AMERICAN PARATROOPER AWARDED THE MEDAL OF HONOR ON 29 FEBRUARY 1944 AT ANZIO, ITALY.



PARTICIPATED IN THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE.

FIVE MEMBERS SELECTED TO SERVE AS PATHFINDERS FOR THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION DURING THE GULF WAR. THEIR HELICOPTER WAS SHOT DOWN DURING A SEARCH AND RESCUE MISSION. TWO WERE KIA AND ONE BECAME A POW.

SINCE THE GULF WAR, THE JRTC AND THE 509TH HAVE HELPED TRAIN MORE UNITS THAT EVENTUALLY DEPLOYED FOR WORLDWIDE MISSIONS THAN ANY OTHER TRAINING CENTER.

